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THE CONDOR

An Illustrated Magazine
of Western Ornithology

Published Bi-Monthly by the Cooper Ornithological Club of California.

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EDITORIALS

As we have had to send in copy for this issue several days in advance of May 1, the date we fixed in our March issue on which to "close the polls" in the vote on certain usages, the final result of the vote will be announced in our July issue. We have received a number of extended arguments, for, as well as against, each of the questions. One of these replies, from Mr. Dawson, is printed in full on another page. We will admit that it presents to us the "capitalization" question in a new light. It pays to "argufy," as long as the contestants are each open to conviction. And we congratulate ourselves on having put these questions before our readers. We are *learning things*.

Whether to establish certain generic names by the "first species rule" or by "elimination" is lately holding the entire attention of several of our experts in nomenclature. Whichever contention wins out, a large number of bird names will have to be changed. For one generic name changed often means many new specific combinations. Mr. Stone and Dr. Allen, both members of the A. O. U. Committee, have come out within a few days of each other with exhaustive reviews of our North American genera of birds treated from the different standpoints. Incidentally a number of old names have been dug out, which the investigators agree will have to replace well-known names if the "law of priority" be strictly enforced.

All this is disheartening. It somehow

seems to us that Taverner is right. Most of the rules in the Code are purely arbitrary, such as the taking of Linnæus at 1758. Why not make one more arbitrary rule, for the sake of uniformity and common sense, and take the A. O. U. 1895 Check-List as establishing the generic names of North American birds for all time? We will just warrant that a three-fourths vote of Fellows and Members of the A. O. U. would authorize such a ruling. And why not? Our system of nomenclature doesn't mean anything in the way of phylogeny anyway. All it can do is to supply names and groupings; and these *ought* to be serviceable. Nomenclature is a game that only a dozen, or less, specialists play at; and the game is never ended. Why not settle on a set of names selected, say, on the grounds of most frequent employment in literature for the past twelve years? Wouldn't a shout of rejoicing be raised by the hundreds of people who are studying *birds* not nomenclature! If this majority would just assert itself, the microscopic minority would find little reason for the continuance of their labors, and their valuable energies would soon be directed into more profitable channels. We mean perfect respect for such men as Allen and Stone who are thoroly conscientious in carrying out the system at present in vogue. The work they do involves drudgery of a most trying sort, unrealized by those who have not attempted similar undertakings. It is the *system* we deprecate.

Our fellow Cooper Club member, Mr. H. H. Bailey, of 321 54th Street, Newport News, Virginia, extends to bird men generally a cordial invitation to look him up at his home during the present Jamestown Exposition. Mr. Bailey has arranged his extensive collections so as to be readily accessible for inspection, and these we have reason to know are well worth one's while to examine.

The Alexander Expedition left Seattle April 10, bound for southeastern Alaska in quest of specimens and information in several departments of natural history. The party is provided with every facility for thoro field work, even to a power boat and crew, so that sequestered islands may be readily visited. Mammals, birds, plants and molluscs will be given most attention. This is the best-equipped expedition which has entered the field on the north-west coast for many years, and we are looking forward to exceptional results. The party consists of Miss A. M. Alexander, who leads the expedition, Mr. Joseph Dixon, Mr. and Mrs. Frank Stephens, and Mr. Chase Littlejohn.

We learn from *Science* of March 15, that "Mr. Frank M. Chapman, curator of ornithology of the American Museum of Natural History, is engaged in making a collection for the museum of southern birds, especially of white herons in various stages of development."

Arizona is not being neglected this year ornithologically; for, aside from the two or three resident bird men, Mr. Austin Paul Smith is collecting in the vicinity of Benson, and Mr. H. W. Marsden is working the Tucson region.

We are indebted to Mr. Robert B. Rockwell, of Denver, for the following information in regard to the new scientific society lately formed in Colorado.

On December 18, 1906, a number of the scientific workers of Colorado met at Denver and organized the Colorado Biological Society, which has been incorporated under the laws of the State of Colorado.

The Charter Membership consists of men specializing in Botany, Mammalogy, Ornithology and Entomology and altho few in numbers at present, the society will endeavor to secure as members all of the scientific workers of Colorado and adjoining states.

The policy of the new organization will be to foster and encourage practical field work, with "*results*" as the watchword. Especial attention will be paid to the collection and preservation of existing biological information relative to Colorado, and investigation along all lines of scientific biological work which have heretofore been more or less neglected.

There has been a growing demand for an organization in the State which would tend to bring scientific students thruout the Rocky Mountain region into closer touch with each other and enable all to work more or less in unison; and it is hoped that the new Society will not only furnish the means to this end but that it will go further and perform the same function for Colorado that the Cooper Club has for California.

The Society has accepted an invitation to affiliate with the Colorado Museum of Natural History, located at Denver, which gives it the necessary backing and support so necessary to a young organization of this kind; thru this combination it is expected that a great deal of work of scientific and practical value will be accomplished.

The charter membership consists of Messrs. Ellsworth Bethel, Victor H. Borchardt, Geo. L. Cannon, Fred M. Dille, J. Clarence Hersey, L. J. Hersey, and Robert B. Rockwell, all of Denver, W. L. Burnett of Ft. Collins, E. R. Warren of Colorado Springs, and W. D. Hollister of Albuquerque, N. M.

All communications to the Society should be addressed to Fred M. Dille, Corresponding Secretary, 307 Continental Bldg., Denver, Colorado.

COMMUNICATIONS

IN REGARD TO THE MOOTED POINTS

Editor THE CONDOR:

If I may be pardoned in exceeding the "postal card" limit, I should like to touch at length on two of the mooted points; for one cannot express either reason or emotion in a single written "Yes" or "No".

(1) Unquestionably those who prefer the metric system are justified by current usage in advanced scientific circles, and they have the future with them. But, as certainly, measurements expressed in the metric system are unintelligible to most of us. They may be laboriously puzzled out, but they are not quickly *sensed*, as are measurements in inches and hundredths. The case is quite hopeless for those of us who do not happen to have enjoyed the early advantages of drill in the metric system. For myself I think I could derive the equation for the Conchoid of Nicomedes with passable credit; but if you told me that an egg was 26.23 mm long, I should have to study to know whether you had a California Condor's or an Anna Hummingbird's. Please, Mr. Editor, be patient with those of us who, altho only half way across the stage, are far too busy to go back and begin over again.

(2) Reformed spelling? Yes; altho I do not follow the President thru thick and thin. The substitution of *t* for *ed*, as in *blusht* and *kist*, is pedantic and, quite evidently, unpopular.

(3) For the capitalization of vernacular names, a hearty *Yes!* And for weightier reasons than those of prominence and eye ease, already recited.

The accepted vernacular names of American ornithology have acquired greater stability than the vaunted Latin. The Latin name of the Evening Grosbeak has been changed twice within the last decade; but no one has thought of changing the vernacular as whimsical as it is. The Western Winter Wren has been *Troglodytes* sp., *Anorthura* sp., and *Olbiorchilus* sp., within recent memory, but the note-book shorthand is still "W. W. W." and always will be, whatever mire of Latinity "*varium et mutabile*" they try to stick it in. Ergo the English name in fact deserves as much consideration at the hands of an editor who would be understood as the scientific name.

But more important still is the fact that the name of a species, whether English or Latin, is a proper name. The basis of distinction between named birds is not individual but specific. We do not call an Audubon Warbler "Mary" to distinguish it from other individuals, but our common aim and interest is to declare it *propre*, or peculiar, as compared with birds of other species, as Myrtle Warbler, Palm Warbler, etc.

This is neither falsification of grammar nor hair-splitting. Moreover, we require capitalization of species in the interest of accuracy. If I speak of an evening grosbeak, I may refer to a specimen of *Habia*—or is it *Zamelodia* now?—*Zamelodia melanocephala*, seen at evening; but there is no uncertainty whatever if I speak of an Evening Grosbeak.